

By: Steve Israel

We take for granted that our parents and grandparents have access to health care. Before Medicare, seniors who could not afford it or seniors who were ill were unable to get health care and paid a terrible price: They had to choose between food and medicine. Medicare changed that.

Tuesday night, in Upstate New York, a long-shot Democratic candidate won a deeply Republican seat after a vigorous debate on the Republican plan to end Medicare to pay for tax subsidies for Big Oil and tax breaks for millionaires. Rep.-elect Kathy Hochul made clear that seniors' dignity would not be sacrificed. And voters of all political parties sent a resounding and unmistakable message: Americans reject the Republican plan to end Medicare.

Protecting and strengthening Medicare isn't about politics, and it isn't about electoral gains. It's about our seniors. It's about our priorities and values as a nation about seniors' health, well-being and economic stability. It's about Democrats' belief that Medicare should not be abolished and transformed into a voucher system it should be strengthened so it can continue to serve future generations. This is the message Kathy Hochul used to win in New York's 26th district; it's the same message we'll take to every district nationwide.

Members of Congress have a choice: Keep our promise to seniors or cut the billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies to Big Oil and tax breaks for multimillionaires and billionaires. Democrats choose seniors. Under the Republican budget, a millionaire gets a \$100,000 tax break but a senior gets an additional \$6,000 health care bill. Democrats will fight those wrong priorities.

Democrats offered to engage with Republicans in a constructive and responsible negotiation to strengthen, improve and reform Medicare. But the Republican plan to end Medicare is non-negotiable.

We can only hope Republicans are listening to Americans. We hope they will turn back their campaign to end Medicare and join Democrats on real solutions to strengthen Medicare, reduce the deficit, create jobs and grow our economy.